

A COLLECTION OF PLANTS FROM THE VICTORIAN PYRENEES IN 1840

by

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There are so few records of any plant collecting in Victoria before the arrival of Ferdinand Mueller (August 1852) that additional evidence of prior collectors holds a special interest. Leschenault, Brown, Mitchell, Gunn, Robertson, Adamson and La Trobe all played some part in the earlier botanical investigation of the colony. To these seven names must now be added that of George Augustus Robinson, better known for his valuable conciliatory and humanitarian labours among the dwindling aboriginal tribes of Tasmania during the 1830's. Robinson came to Melbourne in 1839 and for the next ten years (until December 1849) he was Chief Protector of Aborigines for the Port Phillip District of New South Wales. Returning to England in 1853, after an absence of nearly 30 years, he died in Bath at the age of 78 on 18 October 1866.

Thanks to the generosity of a prominent historian, Mr. Philip L. Brown, Melbourne Herbarium was the fortunate donee, on 22 September 1964, of a small box containing botanical specimens with the following note:

"Picked by G. A. Robinson, Australia, in Feb. 1840†
(on the Pyrenees)."

Mr. Brown obtained this box in March 1939 from Mrs. Prescott, housekeeper to Arthur P. Robinson, who was the last surviving son of the collector, and who had recently died at Combe Down, Bath, on 28 February 1939. The plant collection had remained for 86 years in an old stone house with Robinson's other natural history and ethnological gatherings from Australia. Unfortunately the contents were in rather poor condition and somewhat fragmentary; however, they were worth mounting as herbarium specimens, if only for their historic interest.

None of the specimens had been determined, but they are referable to 16 species of phanerogams, most of which are widespread in south-eastern Australia, viz.:

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| 1. <i>Acrotriche prostrata</i> F. Muell. | 8. <i>Helichrysum semipapposum</i>
(Labill.) DC. |
| 2. <i>Agropyron scabrum</i> (Labill.) Pal.
Beauv. | 9. <i>Helipterum anthemoides</i> (Sieber ex
Spreng.) DC. |
| 3. <i>Epilobium cinereum</i> A. Rich.
(non <i>E. junceum</i> Spreng.) | 10. <i>Lobelia gibbosa</i> Labill. |
| 4. <i>Eryngium rostratum</i> Cav. | 11. <i>Pimelea curviflora</i> R. Br. |
| 5. <i>Gompholobium huegelii</i> Benth. in
Endl. et al. | 12. <i>Pimelea linifolia</i> Sm. |
| 6. <i>Gypsophila australis</i> (Schlechtendal)
A. Gray. | 13. <i>Poa australis</i> R.Br. (sens. lat.) |
| 7. <i>Helichrysum bracteatum</i> (Vent.)
Andr. | 14. <i>Rumex dumosus</i> A.Cunn. ex Meissn. |
| | 15. <i>Themeda australis</i> (R.Br.) Stapf |
| | 16. <i>Wahlenbergia ?communis</i> R. Carolin |

* National Herbarium of Victoria.

† Mr. P. L. Brown considers that the date of collection is more likely to have been July/Aug., 1841, when Robinson is known to have been on the Pyrenees.

It is not known from what part of the Pyrenees Range (about 50 miles long) G. A. Robinson picked his few specimens; nevertheless they certainly constitute the earliest preserved sample of the flora in this mountain region. Major T. L. Mitchell, on 10 July 1836, had crossed from Carapooee to Beazley's Bridge on the Avon River, skirting the Pyrenees just south of St. Arnaud, and climbing a high hill at the northern extremity of the Range (whence he obtained a distant prospect of the Grampians); but he made no botanical collections in this area. Only two species of the Robinson plants, Nos. 12 and 15, were commented on or collected anywhere in Victoria by Mitchell, while the four species numbered 2, 4, 7, and 11 are the only ones on the list known to have been collected at Wando Vale (near Casterton) by J. G. Robertson during the 1840's. The remainder may well be the first samples of those species ever taken in Western Victoria. Number 1 (*Acrotriche prostrata*) would undoubtedly have come from higher cooler forests of this Range, whereas it is equally certain that Nos. 4 and 14 grew on open plains at the foot of the hills.

Although the much more spectacular, and botanically rewarding, Grampians ranges have been the subject of considerable floristic literature, astonishingly little has ever been written about the vegetation of the Pyrenees. One isolated paper of generally descriptive character and limited scientific value is J. W. Audas's "An Eastertide in the Victorian Pyrenees", published in the *Victorian Naturalist* 29: 51-58 (Aug. 1912).

TRISTANIA LACTIFLUA or T. LACTIFLORA ?

In *Muelleria* 1²: 91 (Dec. 1959) I gave reasons for changing the spelling of the epithet in *Tristania lactiflua* F. Muell. *Fragm. Phyt. Aust. I*: 82 (1858) to "*lactiflora*"—the form subsequently used by F. Mueller in both editions of his *Systematic Census of Australian Plants* (1882 and 1889). It now appears that such a change was unwarranted and that the original rendering, as *lactiflua*, should be reinstated. I had overlooked a vital statement in Mueller's diagnosis, viz. "*ramuli fractura lacte acri amaro scatent*", which is convincing evidence that he deliberately chose the epithet *lactiflua* in reference to the acrid latex oozing from broken branches of this tropical tree. Why Mueller should have adopted *lactiflora* ("milky-flowered"), 30 years later, is rather puzzling; it may have been considered more appropriate or euphonious, or the original spelling may later have been accidentally misconstrued by its author.

Mr. L. A. S. Johnson (at the Royal Botanic Gardens and National Herbarium, Sydney) has noted that a milky sap often exudes from young broken branches of *Tristania conferta*, the commonly planted Brush Box, and he kindly drew the writer's attention to the oversight (mentioned above) in connection with *T. lactiflua*.

—J. H. WILLIS.